



Carmen Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Synopsis



ACT I

A square in Seville in front of the barracks guard post and the Royal Tobacco Factory. Soldiers from the Alcalá Dragoons regiment are standing guard, watching the continuous comings and goings of people on the square. Corporal Morales makes note of the presence of a lovely, but timid girl, Micaela, who approaches the guard post and asks to speak to a corporal named Don José. Morales tells her that Don José will be arriving soon and invites her to come into the post while she waits. Micaela, while thankful for this show of kindness and for the attention of the other soldiers, leaves the post, blushing somewhat. At this moment, the changing of the guard occurs and Don José enters. A group of children imitates the marching of the soldiers during the changing of the guard while Morales tells Don José about Micaela's visit.

Lieutenant Zúñiga, who is new to the post, starts a conversation with Don José and asks him if the tobacco factory girls are as beautiful as they are said to be. The Corporal responds in the affirmative. At that moment, the factory bell tolls, indicating the beginning of the midmorning break, and the factory girls go outside to smoke. The square fills with young men who have come to admire the beautiful young

workers. Almost everyone is waiting for Carmen, the lovely gypsy, who catches the attention of all the young men and soldiers from the moment she appears. The only one who does not seem to pay much attention to the seductive charm of the gypsy girl is Don José. When it is time to resume work, however, Carmen throws Don José the flower that she was wearing in her hair and then exits the stage with the rest of the young women. Once again, Micaela comes to the square. This time she sees Don José and gives him a letter from his mother. In the missive, the woman urges her son to marry Micaela. Suddenly there is an enormous din from the tobacco factory and several workers rush out onto the square amid yells and screams due to a fight between Carmen and one of her coworkers. Don José and several other soldiers go into the factory and emerge back out onto the square with the two women responsible for the fight. All the tobacco girls accuse Carmen of starting the brawl, at which point Zúñiga orders the soldiers to take her away. The beautiful gypsy proceeds to put her powerful seductive charm to work and manages to convince Don José to untie her on their way to the jail. She then manages to push the corporal to the ground and uses the resulting confusion to flee the scene, disappearing amidst the crowd.



ACT II

The Lillas Pastia Tavern. Carmen anxiously awaits the arrival of Don José, who has been under arrest for the past month for letting the beautiful gypsy escape after they had already caught her. While she waits, Carmen sings and dances with her friends Frasquita and Mercedes to the delight of Lieutenant Zúñiga and some other soldiers. The matador Escamillo then enters the tavern, accompanied by several people who cheer him on as he goes. In a matter of seconds, the matador becomes enchanted by the beauty and grace of Carmen. She, too, feels attracted to him, but does not pay him any attention because of her impatience to see Don José.

After the tavern closes and the last customers leave, two contrabandists, Remendado and Dancaïre, come in and ask Carmen, Frasquita, and Mercedes to distract the guards with their seductive wiles while they try to pass through a

load of contraband. Carmen insists that she cannot accompany them because she is waiting for her lover. Her two friends leave her alone only after persuading her to do whatever she must to convince Don José to desert the army and join the contrabandists.

When Don José finally arrives, Carmen dances and plays the castanets for him, but she does not manage to convince him to give up his military career. Later, Zúñiga knocks on the door and enters the tavern looking for Carmen. When he sees the Corporal there, he orders him to leave the tavern and go back to the barracks. Don José refuses to go and the two begin to fight. Carmen's cries for help are answered by the contrabandists, who enter the tavern, disarm Zúñiga, and take him away. Don José thus finds himself in a situation in which he has effectively deserted; there is nothing for him to do now but to join the contrabandists.



ACT III

Night in the mountains. Several months have gone by and the contrabandists sing a song in praise of their errant way of life. Don José nostalgically remembers his home and laments the fact that he did not become the man his mother wanted him to be. Carmen reproaches him, telling him that it would be better if he left now and returned home to his mother. The relationship is beginning to show signs of strain, yet Carmen also begins to realize that Don José is a courageous man who will not abandon her.

Meanwhile, Frasquita and Mercedes draw cards to find out what their fate holds. Carmen draws her own cards and becomes agitated when she sees that instead of the lovers and fortunes that lie in store for her friends, her future holds only death, first her own and then that of Don José. It is now Don José's turn to keep watch over the camp while the contrabandists prepare their next move. At the same time, Micaela, accompanied by a guide, approaches the area in search of Don José. He sees someone coming and shoots. The intruder turns out to be Escamillo, who is nearly killed by the bullet. Meanwhile, Micaela has fled the scene at the sound of the gunshot.

Escamillo talks with Don José and tells him that he has come to the mountains to find a beautiful gypsy with whom he has fallen in love. She is, of course, none other than Carmen. Once again, jealousy burns in Don José's tortured heart as he listens to the words of his rival. He tries to stab Escamillo, but the contrabandists suddenly appear and impede the attack. The matador then takes his leave from the group and invites them to come to his next bullfight in Seville.

In the meantime, Micaela, who has gone to the camp to steal some food, is taken by surprise by the contrabandists. When she is finally given the opportunity to talk with Don José, she tells him that his mother is extremely ill and wishes to say goodbye to her son before she dies. Micaela then leaves. Don José begins to make his preparations to leave the camp as well, but before he does, he assures Carmen that he will never abandon her.



ACT IV

Near the bullring in Seville. There is a festive atmosphere among the vendors, city dwellers, matadors, banderilleros, picadors, and children who fill the scene. Escamillo enters, flanked by his helpers, and is received amid shouts of joy at the front gate of the building. Just before entering the ring, he declares his love to Carmen, who has been warned by her friends Frasquita and Mercedes of Don José's presence among the crowd. Carmen decides to wait for him and confront him face to face. When he finally

arrives, Don José repeatedly begs Carmen not to leave him. The gypsy confesses that she loves Escamillo and tells Don José that love must be free. In a rage, Don José stabs her while in the bullring the crowd cheers Escamillo's victory. As the crowd leaves the building, Don José, in tears, confesses his crime and asks them to arrest him.